

FCC Consumer Advisory

FCC Acts to Promote Accessibility of Digital Wireless Phones to Individuals with Hearing Disabilities

If you are an individual who uses a hearing aid or have a friend or family member that does so, please note that on July 10, 2003, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) modified the exemption for wireless phones under the Hearing Aid Compatibility Act of 1988 to require that wireless phone manufacturers and wireless phone service providers make digital wireless phones accessible to individuals who use hearing aids.

The FCC's actions fulfill the Congressional goal of ensuring access to telecommunications services for individuals with hearing disabilities and are critical in light of the rising number of wireless calls to emergency services and the growing trend among wireless carriers to move away from analog services in favor of more efficient, feature-rich digital services.

The FCC ruling requires:

- Digital wireless phone manufacturers to make available to carriers within two years at least two HAC-compliant handsets with reduced RF emissions for each air interface (e.g., CDMA, TDMA, GSM) it offers and each carrier providing digital wireless services, except for nationwide (Tier I) wireless carriers, to make available to consumers within two years at least two HAC-compliant handset models with reduced RF emissions for each air interface it offers;
- Nationwide (Tier I) wireless carriers to offer within two years two HAC-compliant handset models with reduced RF emissions for each air interface it employs, or to ensure that one quarter of its total handset models are HAC-compliant with reduced RF emissions within two years, whichever option yields a greater number of handsets;
- Digital wireless phone manufacturers to make available to carriers within three years at least two HAC-compliant handset models with telecoil coupling for each air interface it produces; and each carrier providing digital wireless services to make available to consumers within three years at least two HAC-compliant handset models with telecoil coupling for each air interface it offers;
- One-half of all digital wireless phone models offered by a digital wireless manufacturer or carrier to be compliant with the reduced RF emissions requirements by February 18, 2008; and

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- Manufacturers to label packages containing compliant handsets and to make information available in the package or product manual, and service providers to make available to consumers the performance ratings of compliant phones.

In addition, the FCC established an exemption for digital wireless manufacturers and carriers that offer a minimal number of handset models.

The FCC also encourages digital wireless phone manufacturers and service providers to offer at least one compliant handset that is a lower-priced model and one that has higher-end features and encourages hearing aid manufacturers to label their pre-customization products according to the ANSI standard.

For additional information about the FCC's actions with regard to hearing aid compatible wireless phones and other steps the Commission has taken to ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to telecommunications services, please go to www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro. You may also contact the FCC's Consumer Call Center at 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY.

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